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Fashion and Self-Fashioning: Clothing Regulation in Renaissance Europe

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Introduction

In 1378 a ten-year-old girl named Nicolosa was fined fourteen lire for wearing a fine silk gown with tassels on the streets of Florence. In 1398 a prostitute of the same city was prosecuted for failing to wear high-heeled slippers and a bell on her head. All across Italy officials were sent to weddings, funerals and general social gatherings to ensure that the participants were wearing the kind of clothing the law specified they could. The common thread between all of these incidents is the attempt being made by the governing bodies of Renaissance Italy to regulate how people dressed, but the question is...why?

Until the last twenty years or so, historians evaluated the role of clothing in history by focusing on the evolution of fashion along a time-line, cataloging the changes that occurred throughout the years but not necessarily analyzing the motivation or meaning of those changes. It is only in recent years that historians like John Styles and Margaret Spufford have advocated for a more analytical approach which aims to put clothing within specific ideological, social, economic and religious contexts.[1]

In preparing for this research project I looked at the psychological, economical, sociological and political motivations of dressing well. Everyone has their own explanations; in the early 20th century the first American psychologist to analyze the fashion process, E.A. Ross, theorized that the greatest motivation for fashion is imitation, in which "the inferior asserts his equality with the superior by copying him...".[2] German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart theorized, rather humorously, that fashion may have gotten its chief momentum from

[1] See John Styles' *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); and Margaret Spufford's *The Great Reclothing of England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hambledon, 1984).

[2] E. A. Ross, "Social Psychology", quoted in Elizabeth Hurlock's *Motivation in Fashion* (New York: [s.n.], 1929), 10. Another psychologist, J.C. Flugel, elaborated on this concept in his suggestion that the ultimate and essential cause of fashion lies in competition, especially of a social nature, in which members of the higher class are unwilling to relinquish signs of their superiority. J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1969).

the competition between the mistress or prostitute and the wife for the affection of the man as they used fashionable dress to create a stronger attraction.[3] Economist and historian Herman Freudenberger has even cited boredom as a possible motivation for dressing well, noting that Czarina Ann of Russia required her courtiers to appear in a different outfit each time they were in her presence.[4]

A common theme that is evident in all of these explanations is the tension that exists where fashion is concerned, specifically in the form of competition between different groups within society. This paper examines these tensions between competitive social groups in Renaissance Italy insofar as they were manifested through the legislation northern Italian city-states enacted in an effort to control the dress of their residents. A survey of sumptuary legislation enacted in Italy between 1350 and 1600 speaks to the growing significance of fashion and its regulation in Renaissance society and the profound effect that it had on the identity of specific Italian groups.

The advent of true fashion in Italy during the 1350s introduced a new system of values to a society whose members were becoming increasingly concerned with self-presentation. In a world where new social and economic changes were challenging existing social hierarchies, it became vital for groups to display their status through their apparel, and to be able to recognize other groups through theirs as well. As a result, during the Renaissance the regulation of clothing became a way for city officials to define different social, religious and gender groups as well as maintain the boundaries between them. The evidence that I have gathered in my research, drawn from sources produced between 1350 and 1600, reflects the social, moral and economic motivations of such regulation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there is no single

[3] Quoted in Herman Freudenberger, "Fashion, Sumptuary Laws, and Business", *Business History Review* 37 (1963): 40.
[4] Freudenberger, 40.

motivation at work throughout all of these cases and to recognize that specific historical circumstances would have influenced legislators.

The Historical Context of Northern Italy

Italy during the Renaissance was the setting for unprecedented social and economic change. A major influencing factor in this change was the rise of urbanization and the innovations it produced. It was during this period that the merchant class first began to gain distinction as a wealthy and powerful group, and its rise in turn became a source of anxiety for the elites whose prestige and affluence was already well-established. The challenges that the middle class presented to the elites were influenced by the opportunities that urbanization provided them, opportunities that were nonexistent in the Middle Ages.

Town life was gregarious and provided possibilities for social mobility that the small villages and exclusive castles of the previous centuries had not. With the rise of cities came more opportunities for social interaction and therefore more occasions to display fine clothing and jewelry in public. These increased opportunities to display one's apparel help explain why there were very few changes in dress during the Middle Ages. In fact, any changes in attire that did take place before the fourteenth-century involved men's clothing and were often determined by military considerations, such as the introduction of plate armor or the emulation of victorious soldiers like the Swiss mercenaries or the Spanish. During this period fashion lasted for long cycles that modern historians have classified as "costume" as opposed to the rapid innovations in hairstyles, footwear and apparel that began to appear in the mid-fourteenth century and introduced true fashion into society.[5]

[5] Carlo Marco Belfanti, "The Civilization of Fashion: At the Origins of a Western Social Institution", *Journal of Social History* 43 (2009): 261.

Additionally, urbanization prompted a rise in consumerism and conspicuous consumption that characterized this era. With the rise of towns came an increase in skilled luxury craft production and marketing as the wealthy became obsessed with acquiring and displaying their affluence via their possessions. It has been said that consumerism was "parent and child to the Renaissance", prompting historians like Richard Goldthwaite to propose that the greater variety of goods that were available during the Renaissance caused people to define themselves in terms of their possessions for the first time.[6] Furthermore, if the development of the individual in the modern sense was first seen during this time, as Renaissance pioneer Jacob Burckhardt famously claimed, then it has been argued that this happened because man attached himself in a "dynamic and creative way to things".[7] This attachment to worldly goods is evident in how much of the Northern Italian city-states economies were structured around textile and luxury production. Florence is a perfect example of this, as the city employed 866 clothiers by 1427, by which time up to 40% of a patrician family's income was devoted to clothing, and a weaver of brocaded velvet earned more in a year than a second chancellor.[8] It is evident that clothing was beginning to play an unprecedented role in the construction of social hierarchies and the consolidation of group identity throughout the urbanized, competitive world of Northern Italy. The ambitions and needs of various social groups within this context would influence what exactly this role would be.

"Cloth and Color Makes an Honorable Man": Defining (Them)selves

[6] Richard Goldthwaite, referenced in Ulinka Rublack's *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.
[7] Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 255.
[8] Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

The influence of consumerism and the rise of "conspicuous consumption" during the Renaissance was monumentally important for how the elites of Italy displayed their own superiority in a society where their nobility was not guaranteed through birthright. It became necessary for elites to demonstrate their affluence and prestige by dressing extravagantly, giving lavishly and living expensively in order to validate their exalted social status. Clothing was the perfect visual indicator of someone's worth as the value of an outfit could be easily assessed by an onlooker based on style, fabric, color, jewelry and other accessories.[9]

The prosperity of the Italian city-states during the fifteenth century resulted in increased expenditure for elites on their wardrobes. The innovations in fashion meant that they had more options in self-representation, but the continued association between clothing and wealth ensured that only elites would be able to afford the visual markers of magnificence that were connected with their status. The fifteenth-century Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti commented on the larger importance of this relationship:

> I will not say [that poverty] wholly hinders a man, but it keeps his virtue...hidden away in obscure squalor...It is thus necessary that virtue should be supplemented by the goods of fortune. Virtue ought to be dressed in those seemly ornaments that it is hard to acquire without affluence and without an abundance of the things that some men call transient and illusory and others call practical and useful.[10]

Alberti's commentary suggests a connection between virtue and wealth that had existed in previous centuries but that was now being reinterpreted to suit the new values of the Renaissance. Outer appearances were becoming linked with inner virtue as the role of clothing expanded to include moral implications, giving the affluent an automatic advantage with their ability to spend outrageously on their apparel. Richard Goldthwaite notes that in Alberti's day

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[9] Mary Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal's Hat* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2005), 176.
[10] Leon Battista Alberti, quoted in Carole Collier Frick's *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 78.

the rich were spending more on personal adornments than ever before, and that after jewelry clothing constituted the single most important category of personal expenditure of the wealthy.[11]

This was certainly true for Ippolito d'Este, a prelate of the sixteenth century and the brother of the Duke of Ferrara. Ippolito is the perfect example of an elite member of Renaissance society whose image was carefully, and expensively, sculpted in order to allow him the opportunities to befriend kings, gain political power, and rise to new heights in the ecclesiastical ranks. As the archbishop of Milan, one who was actively pursuing the elevated rank of a cardinal for much of his career, Ippolito had to present a specific image to the public that emphasized his affluence, and therefore his right to walk amongst the elites of society. And he did this through his clothing.

Ippolito dressed like a secular prince, not a prelate, and his household records show that in 1535 he owned over 400 garments and 611 shoelaces, which took his Master of the Wardrobe four days to inventory.[12] It unquestionably cost a significant amount of money to compile such a wardrobe, but it is equally apparent that Ippolito was willing to spend whatever funds were necessary to outfit himself properly. One record shows that a single outfit in Ippolito's possession would have cost at least 96 scudi, a sum that it would take a carpenter or builder nearly three years to earn, and that Ippolito's tailor earned more than anyone else in the household, including the cook.[13] The amount of funds that Ippolito allocated to his wardrobe, and the personal attention that he gave to his appearance as a wealthy and privileged courtier, demonstrate the lengths elites had to go to to visually legitimize their right to belong to the upper echelons of society.

[11] Goldthwaite, 381.
[12] Hollingsworth, 179.
[13] Hollingsworth, 182.

The concept that clothing reflected one's social status took on new importance as theorists began to discuss what kind of clothes would be demonstrative of each status, resulting in a new genre of how-to literature that related the proper clothing for various groups to wear. This theme was addressed in many of the literary achievements of the day, such as Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, published in 1528. Written as a courtesy book on the composition of an ideal courtier, the essay emphasizes the role that clothing plays in this construction. Castiglione writes that "[A Courtier] ought to consider how he wishes to seem and of what sort he wishes to be esteemed, and to dress accordingly", implying that people should be careful what they wear because their clothing can display them in a certain way and their character can be judged from it. Castiglione's characters also discuss what color of clothing is most suitable for a courtier, arguing that "black is more suitable for garments than any other color is, and if not black, let it at least be somewhat dark...I would have Courtier's dress display that sobriety...for things external often bear witness to the things within",[14] which is reminiscent of Alberti's observation about the connection between outer appearance and inner virtue. From an economic standpoint, darker colors were also more expensive and would reflect the wealth of wearers.

That clothing should be suited to one's social station was a theme also explored in Giovanni Della Casa's treatise on good manners, *Il Galateo*, published in 1559. Della Casa wrote that "The article of clothing, whatever it may be, should fit the person and suit him or her, so that it does not seem that you are wearing someone else's clothes, and especially should be suited to your social station, so that a priest is not dressed as a soldier, and a soldier as a juggler".[15] Cesare Vecellio's treatise *Habiti antichi e moderni di tutto il mondo*, published at the end of the

[14] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), 103.
[15] Giovanni Della Casa, *Il Galateo*, quoted in Carlo Marco Belfanti's "The Civilization of Fashion", 263.

sixteenth century, expands upon the ideas discussed in Castiglione's and Della Casa's works by visually classifying society through their appearances in illustrations of the apparel of people from different social groups.[16] The works of these men demonstrate that the idea that certain groups of people should wear specific kinds of clothes was a growing concern during the sixteenth century, especially as the distinction between different groups began to blur. The competition between elites and the lower classes brought about sumptuary legislation intent on maintaining class boundaries by regulating who was allowed to wear certain kinds of clothes based on their social status, in contrast to the sumptuary laws of previous centuries that were more concerned with limiting extravagance. This new concern of sumptuary legislation demonstrates how the theories of writers like Castiglione, Della Casa and Vecellio were beginning to be put into practice during this period.

Sumptuary Legislation

Sumptuary laws have been present in Italy since antiquity. The ancient Romans were the first to coin the term "sumptuary law" and their laws were just as concerned with limiting extravagance as those of the Renaissance.[17] According to Catherine Kovesi Killerby, "a survey of legislative precedents to medieval Italian laws reveals...that the Italians were employing long-established means to control perennial problems...".[18] Nonetheless, in most instances the institution of a sumptuary law seems to stem from the desire to restrict a society growing increasingly extravagant.

During the sixteenth century the moralistic and social motivations of sumptuary laws escalated, influenced by the Counter-Reformation in Italy and the increased social mobility of

[16] Referenced in Belfanti's "The Civilization of Fashion", 264.
[17] Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy: 1200-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002),12.
[18] Killerby, 9.

the era that caused elites to want to ensure their exclusive use of fine clothing and luxuries.[19] In some cases economic motivations were cited as well, as when legislators were concerned that expensive dowries would reduce their city's population when it became difficult for fathers to outfit their daughters and find them a good match, or when the expense of dressing women extravagantly became too much for their husbands.[20] There were obviously numerous motivations for enacting a sumptuary law; it simply depended on what city officials were most concerned about at the time. Nevertheless, some patterns may be discerned within this body of legislation,

Sumptuary laws were usually directed at women and were aimed at restricting luxury in clothing by limiting how much fabric people were allowed to use for each garment, what kind of material could be used, what kind of jewelry they could wear, and so on.[21] These laws were very specific when determining such constraints, detailing the exact maximum length of a train on a woman's gown or how many pearls she was permitted to wear in her hair. Most significantly, although these laws were imposed upon people of all classes, they were divided into sections based on social status and the limitations differed depending on one's rank.

In 1453, for example, Cardinal Giovanni Bessarion, a papal legate to Bologna, implemented a sumptuary law that was more concerned with maintaining existing class structures through the regulation of clothing than with actually addressing the problem of overall luxury in the city. Most of the law was devoted to specifying which garments were permitted to each class of women in the city, with precedence being given to those belonging to the

[19] Freudenberger, 37.
[20] Freudenberger, 38.
[21] See sumptuary laws from Venice, Siena, Lucca, Bologna and Florence, edited in Emilie Amt's *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 74-74; *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation*, ed. By Katherine Jansen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 189-195; *The Towns of Italy in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Trevor Dean (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 202-205; and *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study*, ed. By Gene Brucker (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 179-181.

households of knights, lords, and men in the textile industry.[22] Within each group it was detailed how many costly dresses a woman was permitted to have, what kind of fabric could be used to make these gowns and even what color they could be, as that could also determine value. For instance, women in a knight's household could own four costly dresses while peasant women were not allowed to wear red silk gowns. The penalty for disobeying this law, excommunication, demonstrates how seriously it was taken and suggests that it was seen as sinful behavior as opposed to simply showing off.[23]

It is evident from the sources of this period that elite men took the need to regulate clothing based on social status very seriously. Leon Battista Alberti wrote in his book on household management that the heads of household should be very involved in the clothing of the family, saying that among their first considerations should be to keep everyone in his household well dressed according to his station.[24] Furthermore, in 1551 thirteen gentlemen from Mantua sent a letter to the Lord of Mantua complaining that a recent sumptuary law did not give sufficient weight to social differences. They argued that:

> If we must observe rank, we fail to see why (be it said without ambition) the merchant should not be at least distinguished from the gentlemen and the villein from the nobleman. It seems strange to us that our reputation, obtained through the virtues of our ancestors and maintained for us with great fatigue and expense...should now be thus offended that, having to distinguish, we are considered at the same level as the lowermost and meanest people in this city.[25]

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[22] The text of Bessarion's edict is in V. Sacco (ed.), *Statuti di Bologna* I, 353ff (Bologna, 1735). Referenced in Catherine Kovesi Killerby's "Heralds of a Well-Instructed Mind: Nicolosa Sanuti's Defence of Women and their Clothes", *Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 3 (1999): 259. Precedence was given first to the households of knights, and following them were nobles, doctors, notaries, bankers, clothiers and the members of the silk guild. Next in the hierarchy were workers like chemists, butchers, goldsmiths and wool-workers, followed by workers like carpenters, shoe-makers and builders, and finally peasants.

[23] Killerby, "Heralds of a Well-Instructed Mind", 259

[24] Referenced in Carole Collier Frick, 80.

[25] Quoted in Belfanti's "The Civilization of Fashion", 266.

Although protests against the restrictions imposed by sumptuary laws can also be found (and will be discussed later in this paper), these objections are overwhelmingly directed at the specifications within the law, not with the fact that this legislation draws distinctions between social groups. Many of these remonstrations came from women, whose relationship with clothing during this period was both complicated and paradoxical.

Defining the "Other": Elite Women, Prostitutes and Jews

Elite women of the Renaissance were subject to many limitations within this strongly patriarchal society. As a result of constraints imposed upon them, and their consequent segregation from public life, these women occupied a marginal place in this often misogynistic society that both exploited and concealed them when it came to dress and physical appearance. The story of the Garden of Eden introduced convoluted connections between women, moral weakness, and clothing that suggested women had a sinful body and nature that needed to be hidden. These associations, in turn, prompted and were used to justify the strict regulation of women and their clothing.

There were many motivations for imposing strict regulations on women. In Florence, officials published a commentary justifying sumptuary legislation in 1433 in which they addressed the social rationale for these laws, and others like them:

> They realize the great desire of these officials to restrain the barbarous and irrepressible bestiality of women, who, not considering the fragility of their nature, but rather with that reprobate and diabolical nature, they force their men, with their honeyed poison, to submit to them.[26]

This text exemplifies the assumptions society had about women, in particular the apparent threat they posed through their sexuality or unfeminine behavior. With concerns such as these, it is

[26] *The Society of Renaissance Florence*, ed. Gene Brucker (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 181.

hardly surprising that Italian officials wanted to limit the influence of their female citizens as much as possible. This document also stressed women's obligation to "replenish the city" instead of spending money on clothing and jewelry, a note that reflects both the moral and economic concerns of the period.[27]

Women were blamed for the excessive expense needed to outfit them as elites, but were simultaneously used by patriarchs to demonstrate the wealth and prestige of families via their apparel. Thus, within the upper echelons of society, women had an especially complicated relationship with clothing as it had the paradoxical purpose of both hiding and advertising the female body. Sumptuary laws of both Bologna and Florence went so far as to blame women for being an expensive burden to their husbands and suggested "on account of these unbearable expenses, men are avoiding matrimony...".[28] Nonetheless, there were rebuttals from women who saw the situation very differently.

In 1437 Venice was losing its war against Milan and appealed to God for aid by enacting a sumptuary law to purge sin from the city. Aimed exclusively at women, the law was very severe and the penalty for disobeying it was excommunication. Rather amusingly, however, instead of succeeding in cleansing the city of vanity and the vice of luxury, the edict seems to have led to an accumulation of excommunications.[29] As a result, Cristina Corner sent a petition to the pope that year, arguing that she should be allowed to wear her fine clothing as "she, who comes from a noble family, beseeches...that she be permitted to wear publicly [her fine dresses and jewelry] in honor of her parents, and of her own beauty...".[30] For the payment of four ducats

[27] *The Society of Renaissance Florence,* 181.
[28] *The Society of Renaissance Florence,* 181.
[29] Killerby, 257.
[30] *Lo statuto inedito delle nozze veneziane emanato nell'anno 1299*, ed. C. Foucard (Venice: Tipografia de commercio, 1858). Tr. E.M.A. Included in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe*, ed. Emilie Amt (New York: Routledge, 1993), 157-58.

and one grosso she was exempted from the law for three years.[31] Five other women of Venice joined together to send an appeal to the pope to beg exemption from the law. Their reasoning was that Venice was renowned for the distinguished visual impression that it made, and that the splendor of the women's clothes was as responsible for this as the city's architectural magnificence.[32] Their argument illustrates how they considered their apparel to be an appropriate contribution to their city's greatness and how their self-worth in regards to civic pride was closely associated with their physical appearance.

One of the most striking voices of dissent during this period was that of Nicolosa Sanuti. Hers was the lengthiest appeal made against sumptuary legislation during the Italian Renaissance, but what makes it truly remarkable is the fact that it was the only one to challenge the ideological assumptions of sumptuary law and defend women while doing so.[33] Written in response to the 1453 law introduced by Cardinal Bessarion in Bologna, discussed above, Sanuti took exception to women of high status being deprived of their beautiful gowns and jewelry and defended women's right, and even their duty, to wear such ornamentation. She argues that the matrons of Bologna are a most virtuous group, and that by wearing their fine garments the Bolognese women are able to display their political virtue and civic pride. She asks: "Does not everyone know that gold and such adornments and all decoration are testimonies to virtue and heralds of a well-instructed mind?"[34]

Few women actually achieved exemption from sumptuary legislation; most either had to give up their fine clothing or face the consequences of disobeying the laws. Some, however,

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[31] Killerby, 257.
[32] Killerby, 257.
[33] Killerby, 255.
[34] "Nicolosae Sanutae matrona bonoiensis ad Reverendissimum in Christo patrem dominum d. Legatum bononiensum ut mulieribus ornamentur resituantur" (Biblioteca Bertoliana vi Vicenza. Cod. G.7.1.2; Miscellanea B. 205 [ant. segn. 6, 8, 22]), referenced in Katherine Killerby's "Heralds of a Well-Instructed Mind", 268.

simply tried to brazen their way out of the situation. Ser Donato di Piccolo di Giovanni, who was charged with enforcing clothing bans in Florence, wrote about the evasive techniques he encountered from women, many of which were truly humorous. Because churches were considered sanctuaries, some women would run into one in order to elude the official, who then had to wait outside for her to reappear. Ser Donato also confronted women who claimed that the finery they were wearing was something else entirely. For instance, one woman wearing a forbidden kind of hood claimed that it was a garland, while another disputed the type of fur she was wearing.[35] Nonetheless, most women were fined for their disobedience. As was the case with elite men, the regulation of women's clothing served to both distinguish them from other classes while also visually exemplifying ideal feminine behavior, such as modesty and obedience, through accepted apparel.

The laws and commentaries of this period show that women were the main target of sumptuary legislation and its enforcement, but it is important to note that regulations were imposed not only to differentiate between women of varying social statuses, but also to distinguish between "good" and "bad" women and between women of separate religious groups. Prostitutes, for example, were as closely monitored as elite women when it came to what they were and were not allowed to wear. As clothing was a visual indicator of moral and social status, many cities decided that it was important for prostitutes, as immoral women of low social standing, to wear clothes that clearly marked them as such.

The main concern seen in the legislation regulating the apparel of prostitutes was that they would display their immorally-earned wealth through ostentatious clothing and jewelry,

[35] Franco Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, no. 137, in F. Sacchetti, *Opere*, ed. A Borlenghi (Milan, 1957), 421-24. Included in *The Towns of Italy in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Trevor Dean.

drawing attention to their lifestyle.[36] City officials were disturbed by the possibility that young women, drawn by the possibility of fine clothes and jewels, would turn to a life of prostitution in order to gain them. Here we can see both the financial and moral issues that motivated the regulation of prostitutes' clothing, but the main impetus behind such laws remained the desire to ensure distinction between social groups.

A major societal concern was the possibility of prostitutes being confused with honest noblewomen if they were wearing elaborate gowns and fine jewelry, suggesting the visual boundaries between the two groups were become troublingly blurred.[37] As a result, sumptuary legislation was introduced throughout Italy during the fourteenth century that forced prostitutes to wear specific articles of clothing that would reflect their occupation, ensuring that social hierarchies were visually identifiable. Tessa Storey, who analyzed court records and some 124 notarial documents regarding the material possessions of courtesans in Rome, argues that the fact that a great number of prostitutes were dressing in clothing inappropriate to their status was highly disturbing to a society in which "just wearing the trappings of social mobility constituted a threat to the established order and could cause general resentment in the city".[38]

Legislation throughout Italy reveals that officials attempted to regulate exactly what prostitutes were allowed to wear in their cities. As early as 1384 the Commune of Florence required them to wear veils, gloves, bells on their head, and high-heeled slippers in a way that mimicked the apparel of biblical whores who made "a tinkling sound with their feet"[39], and in 1400 a housewife named Angela was prosecuted for plying a prostitute's trade without wearing

[36] Tessa Storey, "Clothing Courtesans", in *Clothing Culture 1350-1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 95.
[37] Storey, 99.
[38] Storey, 101.
[39] Isaiah. iii. 16-17.

the required garb.[40] In 1403, the Ufficiali dell'onesta, the first city police force charged with specifically regulating prostitutes, was created in Florence and throughout the years many men complained that it was difficult to differentiate between honest women and prostitutes because of what the latter were wearing.[41] This problem was exacerbated when some cities used prostitutes to curb the ostentatious displays of their own noblewomen by only allowing prostitutes to wear the new, coveted fashions.[42]

The Italian legislation aimed at addressing both the moral and societal issues of prostitution during the Renaissance speaks to the complex relationship between women and clothing, prostitutes and clothing, and elite women and prostitutes. As women, both elites and prostitutes were victims of the same condescension and misogyny, and were subject to male assumptions regarding their excessive vices or lack of morals. Nonetheless, societal dictates demanded that a clear distinction be made between the groups, and that this distinction be made visually apparent through the regulation of specific clothing. Because of their supposed pride and vanity elite women needed to be suppressed and their clothing closely restrained, and, as immoral and greedy creatures, prostitutes likewise needed to be closely scrutinized and controlled. The ostensible vices of these two groups made it necessary for governing bodies to ensure that they could be clearly marked for what they were.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the sumptuary laws often associated Jews with women and prostitutes, as all groups were marginalized in different ways. In Florence, it was the same year that a special police force was formed to assume responsibility for sumptuary enforcement that the city's Jewish population was required to wear distinguishing marks for the

[40] Brucker, 191.
[41] Frick, 186.
[42] Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City", *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 122 (1986): 25.

first time.[43] It had become increasingly difficult to differentiate between Jews and Christians throughout Italy as they spoke the same language, lived in similar houses, and dressed in the same fashions.[44] This became a source of concern in the fifteenth century and when San Bernardino of Siena and his Observant followers began preaching against Jews they found a sympathetic audience.

The marking and eventual segregation of the Italian Jews was a direct product of the preaching of San Bernardino and his followers, who believed that the Jews were corrupt and threatening, and needed to be visually marked as such. The imposition of the "Jewish sign" can almost everywhere be traced to these Franciscans as they created in Italy a "climate of hatred in fear of the Jew" and advocated for their segregation from society.[45] A fifteenth-century law in Bologna required Jewish men over the age of twelve to wear "a sign of cloth or fabric colored yellow" and their women to wear "rings hanging from both ears, and fixed in those ears, which should be and remain uncovered and visible to all".[46] Markings such as these became common throughout Italy, manifesting in symbols like yellow "O"s, red cloth, and earrings for women.

Sumptuary laws aimed exclusively at Jews were also frequently imposed during the Renaissance. In the city of Forli Jews agreed not to wear fur-lined jackets or ones with sleeves lined with silk, for Christian officials deemed that that would be arrogant of them. Additionally, Jewish women were forbidden from wearing a girdle or belt if the silver weighed more than a certain amount, indicating that officials applied the same assumptions regarding women's need for ostentatious displays across social and religious groups. In Florence, the priors found that "a large number of Jews have come to settle in Florence, and scarcely any of them wear a sign, so

[43] Frick, 186.
[44] Hughes, 16.
[45] Hughes, 19.
[46] Quoted in Hughes, 112.

that there is considerable confusion, and it is difficult to distinguish between Jews and Christians", implying that such visual distinctions were necessary. They decided that any Jew over the age of 12 would be required to wear a yellow "O", "over the clothing in a visible place" that was at least one foot in circumference.[47]

Jewish women posed particular problems for officials because it was believed that they were just as vain and extravagant as any other women. Naturally they would be subject to general Jewish sumptuary laws, but they also needed to be distinguished from "honest" women much in the same way that prostitutes needed to be. Thus, earrings were often used to differentiate between Jewish and Christian women, until they became fashionable among Christian women and new symbols of classification had to be found. The Franciscan preacher Giacomo della Marca stated that earrings are jewels "that Jewish women wear in place of circumcision, so that they can be distinguished from other women", emphasizing the need for Jewish women to be distinct from Christian women in the way that their men are physically distinct from Christian men. This regulation was taken very seriously and women were prosecuted when they attempted hide their earrings or go out without them. In Ferrara, for example, a woman named Allegra was arrested for leaving her earrings at home as she attempted to conceal her Jewish identity.[48]

The complex relationship between gender and clothing allowed for connections to be drawn between elite women and other marginalized groups in the eyes of the Franciscans and city officials. The friars believed that women's "endless appetite for finery" made them partners of the Jew as their demands for expensive apparel nourished Jewish usurers.[49] In turn, the concept of Jews as parasites who devoured society was also linked to prostitutes, who were seen

[47] *The Society of Renaissance Florence*, 242.
[48] Hughes, 23.
[49] Hughes, 28.

as equally draining. In Brescia, it was decreed that "While the Christian church may tolerate the Jews...they should be treated as public prostitutes, who because of their filth are tolerated [only] while they live in a bordello...separate from Christians".[50] Because of notions like these, analogies were also drawn between Jewish women and whores, and the clothing both groups were required to wear exemplifies this. In Rome, for instance, the red overskirts that Jewish women wore as their distinguishing sign were also a way that prostitutes were marked. By the end of the fifteenth century, Jewish women were required to wind yellow linen around their heads, but in Pisa and Bologna this also became the symbol of a prostitute.[51] The sartorial connections between these groups speaks to complex social, economic and religious concerns that influenced the need to visually differentiate between them.

Conclusion

In a society that had formerly seen very little change in both clothing styles and social mobility, fashion became a visual symbol of the new importance members of that society placed on how they presented themselves. The social and economic changes that took place during the Renaissance challenged existing social hierarchies and produced anxieties regarding people's ability to recognize members of other social groups and to claim a particular social status for themselves. The relationship between inner virtue and outer appearance that developed during this period justified the need to assign groups particular kinds of clothing based on their supposed moral status. As a result, the regulation of clothing during this period became a way for city officials to both define different social groups as well as maintain the boundaries between them. This is especially evident in the literature produced between 1350 and 1600 that discusses

[50] Agostino Zanelli, "Predicatori a Brescia nel Quattrocento", *Archivo storico lombardo*, 3rd ser. xv/xvi (1901), 137. In Hughes, "Earrings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric", 29.
[51] Hughes, 30.

appropriate clothing for certain groups and legislation that attempts to enforce these conclusions, albeit with a minimal degree of success.

The ideas that circulated regarding appropriate clothing eventually expanded beyond specifications for certain groups and into concerns about national dress and identity. By the sixteenth century, Italians had become interested in cultivating a national identity through their apparel and writers like Castiglione agonized over the fact that Italy, unlike many other nations, had no distinctive dress. He wrote: "But I do not know by what fate it happens that Italy has not, as it was wont to have, a costume that should be recognized as Italian...the old [fashions] were perhaps a badge of freedom, as the new ones have proved an augury of servitude...".[52] Even nations outside of Italy worried over the influence of foreign fashions on national identity and customs and countries like England and France attempted to regulate the importation of foreign textiles.[53]

The influence of clothing on individual, group and national identity during the Renaissance reflects its undeniable significance within Italian society. The study of fashion and its influence from a historical perspective sheds light on how different social groups interacted and the lengths to which they would go to establish boundaries between each other. Although some may have thought that the primary function of clothing was simply adornment, the complex relationship different groups had with their apparel and the way they used it to achieve certain ends demonstrates that the historical world of clothing is much more complicated than we originally thought.

[52] Castiglione, 103.
[53] Freudenberger & Richardson, 42 & 49 respectively.

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